

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Becker Communications, Inc.

Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center

Becker Exhibits Becomes a Lean Enterprise

Client Profile:

Becker Communications was founded in 1968 by photographer Bob Becker, and has 10 different divisions and areas of expertise, including photography, graphic design, digital imaging, video production, digital media, web design, corporate events and incentive travel, Travelinc (a full service corporate and leisure travel agency), Business Theater. Becker Exhibits, a division of Becker Communications, was founded in 1991 and has a client roster that includes Home Depot, Anderson Windows, and JELD-WEN Window and Doors. Located in Schofield, Wisconsin, the company employs 17 people.

Situation:

In 2002, Becker Exhibits was planning to build a new 60,000 square foot facility to house its growing business. The company's management team felt this was an opportune time to re-evaluate the workflow process. To help with the evaluation and subsequent plan of action, Becker Exhibits contacted the Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center (NWMOC), a NIST MEP network affiliate.

Solution:

NWMOC and Becker Exhibit's management team walked through the plant specifically studying the manufacturing process. Once NWMOC had completed its assessment, it worked with the Becker Exhibits team to develop an improvement plan based on the observations noted during the walk through. This plan included employee participation in a lean workshop, the completion of a value stream map, a 5S workplace organization event, and a lean design implementation. Becker Exhibits selected a cross-functional team consisting of shop, sales, design, and management employees. This team participated in a NWMOC-led lean workshop. After completing the lean workshop, the team worked with NWMOC to develop a value stream map of the company's manufacturing processes. Together, they documented each step of each process and evaluated them in terms of efficiency. The team identified several opportunities to improve or eliminate wasteful steps, and made changes to the production line. By reducing waste, the company is more confident about the quality and price of its end products. Next, Becker Exhibits added additional employees to the core team to complete the 5S process of Sorting, Shining, Setting in Order, Standardizing, and Sustaining. It took a very short time for the team to begin implementing the project after they had been coached. The team pared down cluttered work areas and reallocated tools to other work areas. Finally, Becker Exhibits was ready

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to design and implement a better flow for the line. Becker Exhibits worked on the design with the assistance of NWMOC.

In addition to improving sales, reducing inventory, and improving turn around time, Becker has recognized one unexpected benefit in becoming a lean enterprise. The new manufacturing process directly impacts the vendors the company chooses to work with. Becker Exhibits is more likely to utilize vendors that have also embraced lean principles, because it knows they will have quality and cost controls in place.

Results:

- * Increased sales by \$2 million.
- * Reduced labor costs by \$250,000.
- * Reduced inventory by \$100,000.
- * Reduced lead time by 12 days.
- * Decreased costs by \$10,000.

Testimonial:

"We saw a 13 percent increase in sales over an eight-month period compared to twelve months the previous year, a 40 percent reduction in inventory, 95 percent improvement in turnaround time. Factor in our employees' high morale, and it really puts you on cloud nine. This is gigantic! This is what the Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center did for us."

Joel Becker, Vice President/General Manager